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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 2514  
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 0531  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 2989  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 4057  
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 1466  
RHMF/DISA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 001471

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TAGS: PREL PGOV JA

SUBJECT: COMFORT WOMEN: ABE PHONE CALL AIMS TO CLEAR THE AIR; LDP GROUP STILL PLANS U.S. VISIT

Classified By: AMBASSADOR J. THOMAS SCHIEFFER. REASONS 1.4 (B), (D).

¶1. (SBU) Media reaction to Prime Minister Abe's April 3 telephone call with the President has been generally positive. All major dailies on April 4 gave prominent coverage to Abe's statement to the President that he continue to stand by the Kono Statement and express sympathy to the comfort women. Abe is quoted as telling the President that his remarks questioning the historical basis for the Kono Statement, as well as his "true intentions" in making those remarks, have been inaccurately reported. Press reports also play up the President's strong affirmation of trust in Abe, and his comment that "Japan today is not the Japan of WWII." NHK television interpreted Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki's remarks summarizing the telephone call to indicate his understanding that the comfort women issue is not likely to be taken up at the summit.

¶2. (SBU) Less clear from the reporting is whether the media believe that Abe has achieved his goal of neutralizing the sense of crisis over the comfort women issue prior to his April 26-27 visit to Washington. An article in the Asahi notes that "confusion" in the United States over Abe's earlier remarks is likely to continue, despite the telephone call. The left-leaning daily cites the growing support for the Honda Resolution in Congress as evidence of dissatisfaction among some U.S. policy makers, even as the White House and the State Department try to downplay the issue's impact. The newspaper credits the Ambassador and other "Japan hands" for their success in urging Abe to take a more conciliatory approach. The March 5 letter from Senator Inoue to House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lantos is also highlighted. At the same time, the article warns, it may already be too late to reverse the damage, as relations with the United States become more awkward and Japan becomes more isolated in the world community. The report makes clear that Abe will not be able to avoid discussing the issue during his U.S. visit.

¶3. (C) According to an Embassy contact, an NHK television report that Nariaki Nakayama, leader of the group of conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmakers calling for revision of the Kono Statement, is planning to visit the United States in late April to lobby U.S. lawmakers and try to convince them that the Honda Resolution is not quite true.

Kyoko Nishikawa, not Nakayama, is actually planning to lead several members of the group to the U.S., but not until after the Abe visit. Rather than limit discussion to the comfort women issue, however, the group may broaden the focus to include: a FOIA request for documents related to the drafting of Japan's 1947 Constitution by American occupation authorities, in order to clarify the historical background and ultimately strengthen the alliance; a study of the presidential libraries system, a system which does not exist in Japan, thus complicating research into issues such as the drafting of the Kono Statement; and a proposal to launch a U.S.-Japan joint history project, similar to those currently being conducted with China and Korea, in order to strengthen trust and allow more active information sharing.

¶4. (C) In the April 3 edition of his proprietary newsletter, which is distributed daily to the Office of the Prime Minister, Ambassador Hisahiko Okazaki advised Japan's leaders to avoid commenting on the forced recruitment of women for service at the wartime "comfort stations." At the same time, he argues that the official coercion cited as the basis for the Kono Statement is factually incorrect, and that Japan must resist giving in to those false assertions to avoid damaging "the nation's intellectual integrity."

SCHIEFFER